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THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS

IN THE

PRESENT CRISIS.

A LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN BROTHER,

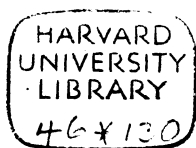
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THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT CRISIS.

MY DEAR BROTHER: Civil war having broken out, and the call to arms being sounded from the press, the platform, and the pulpit, your mind is exercised about your duty as a Christian in the present crisis. Allow me as a fellow Christian and as a minister of the Gospel, to offer you a few weighty considerations upon this subject. But first let me ask you, is your mind subjected, my dear brother, *to the Word of God*? It ought to be perfectly so. In all moral and spiritual things, that Word alone should be your standard of judgment, your law, your guide. Pardon me if in faithfulness I say, you cannot have fairly examined that word, upon this subject, and have also thoroughly submitted yourself to its declarations and commands, and yet be in error or even uncertainty, upon this matter; so plain are the teachings of Scripture on this as on all other points of Christian morality. I can understand, however, the manner in which your mind has been drawn into its present state of perplexity or error. You have listened to the words of man, rather than to those of God. Human arguments, and human examples have misled you. Now turn from them to the divine word; there inquire for the mind of God! Men, devils, and your natural heart, will seek to hinder you from this—they will tell you it is unnecessary—they will try to settle the matter with such words as these: "The government can only be defended on such occasions as this, with the sword; the Christian is bound to defend the government, and therefore bound now to use the sword. If war is

an evil, it is a necessary one ; principles of peace cannot be carried out in this world."

So argues man, and so Satan. But not so the Word of God ! It notices the existence of human governments. It declares, that "the powers that be are ordained of God." It prophesies too their course. It shows what man is, when intrusted with worldly power and authority ; it foretells the judgment of those who have abused such responsibility ; and it points forward to the coming and millennial reign of Christ, the manifestation of whose kingdom is to "break in pieces and consume" all other kingdoms (Dan. ii. 44.), and to fill the whole earth with its presence and glory, its righteousness and peace. But it does not attempt to regulate such governments on *Christian* principles. It lays down the duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants ; but not of Christian rulers ; and that because, while it contemplates the certainty of the Christianity of individuals, it does not contemplate the possibility of the Christianity of nations or governments, before the personal return and millennial reign of Christ. But as to the duties of Christians towards earthly governments, the word of God is not silent. It does not tell them to seek or accept positions of power in them—and thus power and rule over that world which is in open and avowed rebellion against God (Satan being still its prince and its God, John xiv. 30 ; 2 Cor. iv. 4). It does not tell them to seek authority over the world which has rejected Christ, but rather that "it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and for the servant that he be as his Lord."

It does not even tell them to defend the government under which they live. There is not a single passage in the Scriptures bidding Christians to defend any government on earth. They are commanded to "be subject to the higher powers," to "pay tribute," to "render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (Rom. xiii.) ; "they are commanded to be subject unto principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready

to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but *gentle*, showing *all meekness unto all men*." (Titus iii. 12.) The Word of God exhorts that "supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, *for kings and for all that are in authority*; that we may lead a quiet and *peaceable* life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2), and in cases in which the commands of rulers and those of God are directly opposed and conflicting, it bids them obey God rather than men. (Acts iv. 19, and v. 29.)

These are the duties of Christians towards earthly governments, laid down in the Scriptures, and the only ones with which I am acquainted, and as the Word of God does not command the Christian to defend such governments, nor in any way to identify himself with them, but simply to *submit to*, and *pray for* them, so it does not command him to use the sword in their defence, or for any purpose but *the direct contrary*. It positively forbids his using any weapon of injury, either in an offensive or a defensive way. It commands him to act towards all others, on those principles of love, which are utterly opposed to the infliction of injury, whether by the sword or by other means; and to those Christians who have been betrayed into the use of the sword, it speaks words of rebuke and warning; threatening those who persist in such a course, with punishment and death, by the very weapon they have drawn in aggression or defence.

The testimony which the Word of God bears upon this subject may be divided into three parts:—

I. The great principles it lays down as characteristic of Christianity.

II. The precepts which it gives to the Christian Church.

III. The example of our Lord, and the examples of the apostles and first Christians (as far as they followed in Christ's steps), which it presents to the Church for imitation.

I. As to the principles characteristic of Christianity. *They are those of love!* If we examine the principles on which God

acts towards his saints in this dispensation, we find they are those of love! Mercy and grace are only love in action, towards the guilty and hell-deserving. If we examine the foundation of all Christianity, the cross of Christ, we find that its grand characteristic *is that of love!* "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John iv. 10.) "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners (even enemies, v. 10), Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8.) And if we examine the principles on which Christians are to act, towards God and towards men, toward each other and toward the world, we find *they are those of love!*

"Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, *and walk in love.*" (Eph. v. 1, 2.) Because God has shown them mercy they are to show others mercy. Because God has forgiven them their trespasses, they are to forgive others their trespasses. Because God deals with them in grace, pure unmingled grace, they are to deal with others in grace, even such grace, following God; *walking in love.* Now I ask you, do such principles accord with those of war? Can a Christian acting upon such principles, engage in the work of human slaughter? Can he? If he plunges the sword in human bosom, must it not be in direct and shocking violation of these principles? Is it acting in love towards a man to stab him? Is it acting in mercy towards a man to run him through with a bayonet? or in grace to blow his brains out? Can any man dare to say that it is? If you admit that it is not, and you *cannot do otherwise*, then you admit that, the Christian being bound by the gracious manner of God's dealings with him, and by the first and deepest principles of the religion of Jesus, to act towards all others in grace, mercy, and love, cannot lawfully engage in the work of human slaughter, cannot lawfully engage in war.

Perhaps, like many others, you urge the fact that war was permitted and even commanded by God, under the Jewish dispensation, and that what was right for the people of God to

do *then*, cannot be wrong *now*. Let me entreat you to pause and consider what you say!

Your argument is, that what was right under the Jewish dispensation is right under the Christian; that war was right under the first, and therefore must be right under the second. But is not this argument founded on an unscriptural assumption? Know you not the difference between the Jewish and Christian dispensations? Know you not that the Jews were placed *under law*, and were therefore bound to deal with others *in law*; whereas Christians are placed not under law, but *under grace*, and are consequently bound to deal with others *not in law, but in grace*? And know you not that on this very ground the Lord himself forbids the Christian's doing things that the Jew had been *commanded* to do? Look at the fifth of Matthew; there the Lord, after pronouncing benedictions upon the "poor in spirit," "the meek," "the merciful," "the peace-makers," says (alluding to the Jewish law "thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe," Ex. xxi. 24), "Ye have heard that it hath been said an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; *but* I SAY UNTO YOU, that ye RESIST NOT EVIL; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Is not this clear? Is it not to the point? Does it not distinguish between the Jewish and Christian dispensations? Does it not show that whereas the first was one of pure justice, righteousness, law; the second is one of unmingled grace? Does it not show that there are acts, commanded by the first which are forbidden by the second? Does it not prove that certain actions, right under the first, would be wrong under the second? And does it not show that *war*, which was lawful under the Jewish dispensation, is forbidden as wrong under the Christian? For, what is war in its mildest form—defensive war—but *resistance of evil*? And does not

our Lord here forbid all such resistance of evil? Perhaps you hesitate to admit this. Strange hesitation! Have the words "I say unto you that ye *resist not evil*," any meaning at all? If they have a meaning, what is that meaning? Does not our Lord plainly illustrate their meaning in three different ways? and can you be in darkness about it? Look at the first example which he gives in explanation of his command, "resist not evil." A man smites you on the right cheek; are you to retaliate? No! Are you to inflict deserved punishment? No! Are you to threaten? No! Are you to arm yourself in self defence? No! What then are you to do? *Submit*; and *submit to be smitten again* if he wills to repeat his wicked act: "turn to him the other also." Is this the spirit and practice of human warfare? Is it not diametrically opposed to it?

Look again at the fifth of Matthew. Our Lord continues, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shall love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but *I say unto you, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES*, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Thus again does he distinguish between the Jewish and Christian dispensations: and thus again does he condemn under the Christian dispensation, the principles which lead to war, and enforce the principles which lead to war's opposite—even to perfect peace. "*I say unto you, love your enemies.*" Can you hesitate any longer, dear brother? Do you not see that you cannot, under the influence, or in the exercise of tender love towards your enemy, stab, or shoot, or kill him? And that if you may not stab, or shoot, or kill him, you may not go to war? God forbid you should shrink back from this truth any longer!

A word or two more about the general character and spirit of Christianity. The following passages present the simple

truth upon this subject, and in doing so speak volumes against a Christian's engaging in war.

First look at the character of those whom Christ pronounces blessed, in the 5th ch. of Matthew. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: blessed are they that mourn: blessed are the meek: blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: blessed are the merciful: blessed are the pure in heart: blessed are the peacemakers: blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." This is the spirit of true Christianity! And how opposed to that of war! And observe the benediction he pronounces upon *the meek, the merciful, and the peacemaker*: the meek "shall inherit the earth:" the merciful "shall obtain mercy:" and *the peacemakers* "*shall be called the children of God!*"

Well may these words present the spirit of Christianity, seeing they give us the very transcript and image of the character of Christ himself.

Look also at the characteristics of Christian charity, presented in 1 Cor. xiii. I quote some of them. "Charity suffereth long and is kind; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; beareth all things; endureth all things; never faileth." What a contrast does this present to even the spirit of defensive warfare! Let us remember, that whatever else we have, if we have not this charity, we are "nothing" before God.

Look also at the works of the flesh, and the fruits of the spirit, described in the fifth of Galatians. Here again we find contrasted the spirit of war, and that of Christianity.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT.

"But the fruit of the spirit, is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law."

*

What, let me ask you, are the passions which lead to "wars and fightings," but those of the flesh, here so solemnly condemned! And on the other hand, how is it possible to conceive "wars and fightings" carried out, on the principles of the fruits of the spirit, here so earnestly enjoined?

Is it possible for man to fight with man, on principles of love, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and peace? Happy are they who like the apostle can add, we "who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts." Dear brother! "If we live in the spirit, let us walk in the spirit," and we "shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

Before passing on to the next point, I would notice some objections urged against the views I here advocate. It is alleged that the passages already quoted refer exclusively to the Christian's duty of non-resistance *when persecuted for Christ's sake*. To prove the fallacy of this objection it is enough to refer to our Lord's words in the 5th of Matthew. One of the cases there mentioned, in which our Lord commands non-resistance on the Christian's part, is the case of the Christian's being merely robbed of his coat by a thief (evidently not one of persecution for Christ's sake). The objection therefore falls to the ground.

Again it is stated, that the passages here quoted discountenance and forbid only *a wicked spirit of revenge and malice*; not *an infliction of deserved punishment on evil-doers*. It is sufficient to answer, that the thing forbidden by our Lord in the fifth of Matthew, is *the very thing permitted* by God to the Jews under the old dispensation; and cannot be therefore merely a wicked spirit of revenge and malice. No one will say that God *ever* sanctioned such a spirit; but it is impossible to deny that He did sanction in the Jew an exercise of *strict* justice towards others, which the Lord Jesus Christ emphatically prohibits in the Christian.

Again it is said, that while a Christian is forbidden avenging his *private injuries*, he is not freed from the responsibility of

assisting to avenge public wrongs; but on the contrary he is bound for the good of society to do so. Now why is a Christian forbidden to avenge his own personal wrongs? Not on the ground that such avenging of evil is reprehensible *in itself* (as we have seen), but simply because *as a Christian* he is responsible to God, to act towards his fellow men *only in grace*. (On what other ground did our Lord forbid the Christian's exercising righteous judgment, in Matt. v., and command his non-avenging evil treatment? On no other, surely.) Now this responsibility to God can never be set aside by his position in society. The same principle which prohibits his avenging personal injury—a thing right in itself, also prohibits his avenging public injury—a thing right in itself: both involve the exercise of unmingled justice, and are opposed to the exercise of pure grace. Observe, dear brother, I speak of the duty of *the Christian*; not of the duty of worldly men towards each other.

II. *As to the precepts* which the word of God gives to the Christian Church. What do they inculcate but “peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness” (Gal. v. 22, 23), “mercy, kindness, forbearance, forgiveness, charity?” (Col. iii. 12–14.) In a word, what but love? There is not one precept given to the Christian Church which enjoins war, whether offensive or defensive. There is not one which countenances war. There is not one which even permits war. I go still further. There is not one which countenances the Christian in inflicting deserved punishment upon his fellow men: not one which countenances his going to law with another, or casting another into prison for debt, or in any way entering into judgment with another. There is not one which even enjoins or permits the Christian's resisting evil treatment from others. I go still further. There is not one which does not, in spirit, or letter, or both, positively discountenance and condemn all dealing with others which is not characterized by grace, mercy, and love.

For the sake of clearness, I have selected from the mass of Christian precepts contained in the New Testament—all harmonious, I need hardly observe, in spirit—the following *twelve*, which I have contrasted with corresponding precepts of war; and, from the comparison, I leave you to draw the inference with respect to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of war under the *Christian* dispensation.

PRECEPTS OF WAR.

Resist evil treatment from others.

"Hate thine enemy" (quoted in Matt. v. 43).

Recompense to your enemies evil for evil.

Avenge yourselves on those who oppress you, or rebel against you.

Submit not to insult, injustice, or cruelty; vengeance is ours—we will repay.

Overcome opposition and rebellion with the sword and the gun, with shot and shell.

Follow war with the enemies of your country.

Fight for military glory.

Put on therefore, as the defenders of your countries, brave and patriotic, swords, pistols, daggers, guns, and bayonets; fighting with one another, and killing one another, if your nations have quarrels against each other.

The servant of his country must strive, and be violent towards some men.

Your country sends you forth as armed soldiers to destroy her enemies; be ye therefore *warlike as eagles*, and fierce as lions!

Draw your sword, and defend yourself and your country; lest you perish with the sword.

PRECEPTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

"Resist not evil." Matt. v. 39.

"Love your enemies." Matt. v. 44.

"Recompense to no man evil for evil." Rom. xii. 17.

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves." Rom. xii. 19.

"Give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine—I will repay, saith the Lord." Rom. xii. 19.

"Overcome evil with good." Rom. xii. 21.

"Follow peace with all men." Heb. xii. 14.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory." Phil. ii. 3.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." Col. iii. 12, 13.

"The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men." 2 Tim. ii. 24.

"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore *harmless as doves*." Matt. x. 16.

"*Put up again thy sword into his place: FOR ALL THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD SHALL PERISH WITH THE SWORD.*" Matt. xxvi. 52.

I cannot forbear adding, in review of these and similar Scriptures, that it is my solemn conviction before God, that a Christian, engaging in or encouraging war, whether offensive or defensive, does so *in open violation of every precept of Christianity*, bearing upon his conduct in this respect.

III. As to *the example* of our Lord, and the example of the Apostles and first Christians (as far as they trod in Christ's steps), which the Word of God presents to the church for imitation.

First, with respect to the *example of our Lord*, as far as it bears upon this subject. My dear Christian brother, is there any need that I should prove to you that He who "left us an example that we should follow in His steps" never lifted up His hand to do injury to others, even in His own defence? Oh how opposite to everything warlike was His spirit and conduct! Look at some of the declarations of Scripture concerning Him. Isaiah says of Him, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth." Isa. liii. 7. "He did no violence." Isa. liii. 9. When the Samaritans rejected Him, and James and John said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?" He turned and rebuked them, and said, "*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man IS NOT COME TO DESTROY MEN'S LIVES, but to save them.*" Luke ix. 53-55. Even when foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, He "wept" over the city. Luke xix. 41. When Peter struck the servant of the High Priest with the sword, and smote off his ear, the Lord healed the wounded man, and rebuked Peter, saying, "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matt. xxvi. 52. And when struck, and spat upon, and mocked, and blasphemed, and scourged, and crucified, His only cry was, "Father, *forgive* them, for they know not what they do." Luke xxiii. 34. Well might the Apostle Paul say of Him that He was "*harmless,*" as well as "holy, undefiled, separate from

sinners" (Heb. vii. 26); and the Apostle Peter, that "when He was reviled, He reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." 1 Pet. ii. 23.

Perhaps you feel half inclined to urge that our Lord, just before His betrayal, said, "He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one;" and ask "what were they to buy swords for, if swords might not be used?" I freely admit that if our Lord meant that His servants should buy military weapons, He meant that they should use them, should fight with them. But did He mean to command His disciples to purchase and use such weapons? Perhaps you say, "Peter so understood Him, for he used the sword just afterwards to smite off the ear of the High Priest's servant? I answer, Did not our Lord rebuke him for so doing? Did He not heal the wound His rash and mistaken follower had made? Did He not disarm him of this military weapon by the stern and positive command, "*Put up again thy sword into his place?*" Did He not in disarming Peter of the sword express His desire to disarm all His followers of such weapons? And did He not in the strongest manner reprobate the use of the sword, by the emphatic and sweeping sentence, "*All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword?*" What can be plainer than that our Lord never meant to command or countenance the use by His servants of this deadly weapon? If you take the words *literally*, you must understand the Lord to mean that the twelve apostles should arm themselves with twelve swords—that in order to obtain these weapons, they were, if necessary, even to sell their garments, that they might, with the money thus obtained, purchase them—and that, having procured swords, they were to use them—at least, to *defend themselves* from their enemies. Now, I beg you to observe that the Lord could not mean the disciples so to act (and that, therefore, the text "he that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one," cannot be taken literally), for the following reasons: First, He could not mean that the twelve apostles should arm themselves with twelve swords; for when some of them said

“Lord, here are *two* swords,” He answered, “It is *enough*.” How could two swords be enough to arm twelve men with a sword apiece? And, secondly, that our Lord could not mean that they should use swords as weapons of defence; for when Peter drew one for this purpose, He rebuked him, saying, “Put up again thy sword into his place;” and added the solemn declaration which I entreat you to ponder well, “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

As to the true meaning of our Lord’s words “he that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one;” it appears to me that he meant by them, to put strongly before his disciples the general truth that they were about to be left in an exposed and defenceless condition, by his being removed from their midst. The following seems to be the substance of his address to them: “Formerly, when I was with you to provide for and protect you, I sent you forth without purse, or scrip, or sword; but now you must prepare to provide for and protect yourselves, for I am about to be removed from you, and to leave you in a state of want and exposure, in the midst of your enemies!” Certainly, whatever the meaning of these words, they only apply to the brief interval of our Lord’s *absence* from his disciples—the interval between his betrayal and his resurrection, or at most, between his betrayal and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. For neither before his betrayal, nor after his resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit, did he leave them unprovided for and unprotected. His last words on earth to his disciples were “*Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*” These words then cannot by any possible construction justify the use of the sword by Christians at the present day.

I believe that some persons have ventured to assert that the only reason why our Lord did not permit himself to be defended on this occasion by the sword, was that it would have prevented the accomplishment of his great object; the laying down of his life upon the cross. To such it is sufficient to answer, that our Lord in disarming Peter spoke as follows:

“Put up again thy sword into his place, *for* all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword;” and thus assigned as his *primary reason* for the command, one which would not merely prevent his servants fighting *then*, but would also prevent their fighting *at any time*. He did not say, “Put up thy sword on this occasion, because I desire to lay down my life;” but, “Put up thy sword, for all they that take it *shall perish with it*.”

Having looked at our Lord's example with reference to this subject, let us now examine that of his Apostles, and of the first Christians as presented to us in Scripture for our imitation. Did they engage in or countenance offensive or even defensive warfare? Never, that we have any record of! Did they ever attempt righteously to avenge themselves, on others who ill-treated them, using for that purpose the arm of the law or civil powers? Never, that we have any record of! Did they ever make use of any weapon to defend themselves from personal assault or injury, from the hands of their enemies? Never, that we have any record of! (except in the case of Peter, whose act on this occasion was condemned by the Lord, as we have already seen.) Instead of revenging themselves directly or indirectly, on others, instead of even resisting evil treatment from others, their course was always one of submission, one of grace. They were insulted, beaten, robbed, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, and many of them murdered, and all this without provocation or evil on their part, and yet they maintained through it all, the path of unresisting submission. True they sometimes spoke of the injustice and cruelty of such treatment—but never did they revenge themselves, never availed themselves of the law, for the punishment of their persecutors, never used deadly weapons in self-defence; but on the contrary, returned evil with good, cursing with blessing, hatred with love. Who, following such examples, treading in such steps, can plunge the sword in human bosom? Can *grace* be ever the executioner of wrath? Can grace ever inflict even deserved judgment, merited death? If it can,

then grace is no more grace, but is law. But, dear brother, you know *grace is not law*, and those who walk in grace, as did the Apostles and first Christians, would sooner suffer the sword to be sheathed in their own bosoms, than bury it in that of another. Who that is intelligent and ingenuous can doubt this?

Two or three passages would I quote from the writings of the Apostles, in illustration of their opinions and practices, with respect to war. "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" says the Apostle James. "Come they not *hence*, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not, ye kill and desire to have and cannot obtain; ye *fight and war*, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and obtain not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers, and adulteresses! Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God. Submit yourselves therefore, to God. *Cleanse your hands, ye sinners*, and purify your hearts, ye double minded." See also James iii. 14-18. The Apostle Paul declares with respect to his own course, "For though we walk in the flesh, (*i. e.* in the body) **WE DO NOT WAR AFTER THE FLESH: for THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE ARE NOT CARNAL.**" (2 Cor. x. 3, 4.) Can any soldier thus disclaim the use of carnal weapons? Can any man who fights with his fellow man, deny that he wars after the flesh? Elsewhere the Apostle declares, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," (or human beings, Eph. vi. 12.) No, their warfare was of a different character, like their divine master, they sought not "*to destroy men's lives*, but to save them;" they wrestled only against Satan and his hosts; and the only armor they wore was "the whole armor of God;" even "the girdle of truth; the breastplate of righteousness; shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of peace; the shield of faith; the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the spirit." Eph. 6. And well will it be for us, if we use no armor but this, "the armor of God," and engage in no warfare, but

“the good fight of faith;” for “GOD HATH CALLED US TO PEACE.”

Before concluding these remarks on the practice of our Lord and his apostles, I must notice the objection which some would raise here, to the effect that our Lord in the case of the centurion, and Peter in the case of Cornelius, did not condemn the warlike character of their professions.

The whole weight of this argument rests not on any approval manifested by our Lord and his apostle, but simply on *their silence* in these cases. But can we argue that Christ and his apostle approved everything they did not by words condemn? Can we argue that they approved offensive warfare (which was the principal character of that waged by the Roman army, in which Cornelius and the centurion served) from the fact of their silence on these occasions, when on other occasions they so emphatically condemned even the resistance of evil in self-defence? Surely not! Perhaps it will be said that Cornelius continued in the Roman army after his conversion. But this cannot be proved. The Scriptures are silent as to whether he retained or relinquished his unchristian profession.

Perhaps the case of John the Baptist and the soldiers who came to him occurs to you as an objection. I would remind you that even if it could be shown that John approved the profession of these soldiers (which it cannot), yet his conduct can be no example in this particular for *Christian* imitation—seeing he did not belong to the Christian dispensation—which is manifest from our Lord’s words concerning him, “He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matt. xi. 11.)

I may add that it was not until the Church became utterly corrupt that she relinquished the position maintained by our Lord and the apostles with respect to war. The primitive Christians refused to fight with human enemies. The testimonies against war borne by Polycarp, Maximilian, Marcellus, Cassian, Tarachus, Justyn Martyr, Tatian, Clemens of Alexandria, Lactantius, Origen, Tertullian, and others, might be

quoted in proof of this. *There is not a record to be found, in writings sacred or profane, of the existence of a Christian soldier during the first two hundred years of the Church's history!* Subsequently to this, however, with the introduction and increase of flagrant corruptions in Christianity, the profession of arms among Christians became by no means uncommon, and has continued so to this age.

Hollow, therefore, is the argument for human bloodshed which some adduce from the practice of warfare by certain Christians at the present day. We have already learned from history *how* and *when* the practice commenced among professors of the name of Jesus. It is simply a part of the general declension from early love and piety, long openly manifested by the Church of Christ. And what does the argument amount to? Merely this: Good men fight, *therefore* good men may fight! As well might one argue, Good men sin, *therefore* good men may sin. The characters of Col. Gardiner and Headly Vicars can no more justify a Christian engaging in war, than the character of Pascal or Fénélon can justify a Christian being a member of the Church of Rome.

Surely there is no need to say more against such an argument. One thing, however, ought to be noticed in connection with this: that our Lord's words concerning the sad experience of those who take the sword, have been strikingly fulfilled in many of the cases often quoted. How perished Col. Gardiner? "*With the sword!*" And how Headly Vicar? "*With the sword!*" And so with thousands of other Christians who have dyed their hands in the blood of human enemies on the field of battle. And oh! how such must have wondered and blushed at themselves on entering the perfectly peaceful presence of that blessed One, who being "full of grace," is still acting toward his enemies in infinite mercy; on entering *that presence*, fresh from the surging strife and burning passions of the scene of human carnage! Many a martyr has departed to be with Christ, from scenes of bloodshed, but the dying moments of such have been characterized by the endurance *from* their enemies, not by the infliction *on* their enemies, of injury and death. They have

died, not in the fearful struggle with their foes, but like their Master, and like Stephen, praying for their murderers: "Father, forgive them:" "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." They fell asleep at peace with God and man. "Mark the *perfect* man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man *is peace*;" in the deepest sense—*peace*.

In conclusion, I beg you, dear brother, to remember two things especially which I have shown in this letter: 1st. That submission to the powers that be, which the Lord requires from his people, does not include active co-operation with these powers, much less the obligation to draw the sword in their defence. If it does, the apostles themselves yielded not this submission. Did they actively co-operate with the Roman government? Did they draw, or would they have drawn the sword in its defence? It is no use to argue that the obligation is changed by the superiority of the government under which we live to that under which the apostles lived; for the word of God *says nothing* about the obligation of Christians to defend human governments in such cases. It requires from the Christian in every case (without any regard to the character of the government) *neither more nor less than simple submission*; and, 2d. That while the Lord requires from his followers, obedience to magistrates, he also requires disobedience to them in cases in which their commands are directly contrary to his own; *which I have shown to be the present case*. For while the earthly ruler commands you to take up arms against your fellow men, the Lord commands you to love your enemies, to refrain from strife, to follow peace with all men, to be meek, merciful, and gentle, towards all men; not even to resist evil treatment from any man, to be a peacemaker, and in short, to deal with others in the gracious way in which God has dealt with you. On this last point, viz. that of dealing with all others in grace on the ground that God has so dealt with you, let me entreat you to weigh well our Lord's words in the parable of the wicked servant (Matt. 18, 23-35): "Oh thou wicked servant, SHOULDEST NOT THOU ALSO HAVE HAD COMPASSION ON THY FELLOW-SERVANT, EVEN AS I HAD PITY ON THEE?"

Do not, I again entreat you, hide yourself from the clear and searching light of the Divine commands, under the wretched shelter of arguments drawn from *mere expediency*! Do not say, "What will become of us, if we so act?" or "What will become of the country, if Christians act so?" **OBEY GOD and he will take care of the results.** Do not bring forth as multitudes do as an argument for defensive warfare, the statement that "the first law of nature is self defence." Remember there are two kinds of self defence. The kind which does no injury to your fellow-man; and another kind which does him injury; that the latter kind is forbidden to the Christian, and that defensive warfare, being of the latter kind, is thus prohibited.

Do not say, "Other nations will never act on these principles of love and peace, if ours were to try and do so, it would become a prey in the attempt." I know that other nations will never act so! *Nor will yours.* No matter what its professions of national Christianity, it will continue to act as the world, of which it forms a part, acts, until the millennial coming and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Till then, "wars, and rumors of wars" will continue; not till then will "nations beat their swords into plowshares, and learn war no more." But this does not abolish, or even alter *your individual responsibility* to carry out the principles of love and peace. "Every one of us shall give account *of himself* to God."

Do not say, "It is impossible to live according to these principles in such a world as this." God commands it. Our Lord, and his apostles, and thousands following in their steps, have done it; and so should you, dear brother, no matter what shame, inconvenience, or suffering, such a course might subject you to.

Do not say, "No man who loves his country could refrain from arming in its defence when it is attacked!" Say, rather, "No Christian who loves his Lord would, for the sake of his country or anything else, disobey his Lord's commands, by drawing the sword when *he* bids him sheathe it; by going to war when *he* bids him walk in love, grace, and mercy towards all men.

And do not excuse yourself from obedience to these precepts, on the ground that they are part of "the higher Christian morality," *this being the strongest reason why you should obey them!* No doubt *Christian* morality is higher than mere *natural*, or even *Jewish* morality. "Except your righteousness shall *exceed* that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. v. 20. But the highest Christian morality is that which is binding on every Christian!

If any objection which I have not here mentioned should occur to you, I refer you to the Word of God for its answer. Oh, how deep a need has the Christian Church, at the present time, of a better acquaintance with that word! Surely, a clearer understanding of it would have kept multitudes of them from the warlike, carnal course they are at present pursuing. Especially should those of them who are teachers of that word more closely and prayerfully study it, that they may not, while professing to preach "the gospel of *peace*," violate its principles by preaching war; and advocating the Christian's engaging in the work of human slaughter. Fearful is the position taken by the professed "ambassador for Christ" who thus publicly defends "destroying men's lives." Let such consider "what spirit they are of," and, for the future, conform their conduct more to the principles, precepts, and practice of Him who "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And now, my dear brother, that I have, as I believe, laid before you God's truth upon the subject of the Christian's duty in the present crisis, not to draw the sword, or in any way advocate the cause of war, but rather to bear testimony by word and deed for the *gracious and peaceful* principles of the religion of Jesus, I conclude, leaving this matter to be settled between your own soul and God. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Jas. iv. 17. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." John xiii. 17.

Yours, faithfully and affectionately in the Lord,

H. GRATTAN GUINNESS.

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